CHAPTER 9

Revolt of the Miners: Colorado, 1913–1914

On April 21, 1914, in the quiet of the afternoon, a telephone lineman was making his way through the ruins of a tent colony in southern Colorado. He lifted an iron cot covering a pit under one of the tents and found the blackened, swollen bodies of eleven children and two women. The news was flashed to the world, and the tragedy was given a name: the "Ludlow Massacre." All told, twenty-one persons, including the eleven children, lost their lives in one of the most shameful episodes in all of American history.[1]

The tragedy was the central event in a 14-month strike of members of the United Mine Workers of America against the management of the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company, which took a toll of sixty-six lives. It was a battle against conditions which today seem to belong to the Middle Ages, but which were typical of many industrial communities in America on the eve of World War I. But in none did the conditions more resemble those of medieval feudalism than in the Rockefeller-dominated coal fields of southern Colorado.

In 1902, John D. Rockefeller, Sr. bought control of the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company and the Victor Fuel Company, the two major producers in the southern fields, and made them part of Rockefeller's industrial empire. Colorado Fuel & Oil produced 40 percent of the coal dug in Colorado and dominated coal and iron production activities in the Southwest. In 1911, Rockefeller, Sr. turned over his interest in the corporation, which amounted to 40 percent of the stock, to his son, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who made major policy decisions from his office at 26 Broadway in New York City. John R. Lawson, the most important

leader of the 1913–1914 strike, in testimony before the Commission on Industrial Relations, characterized the absentee owner, Rockefeller, as "invested with what is virtually the power of life and death over 12,000 men and their families, for the isolated nature of the coal industry lends itself to absolutism unknown in other activities. . . ."[2]

The situation was made even worse by the fact that both J. F. Wellborn, president of Colorado Fuel & Iron, and L. M. Bowers, its superintendent, maintained their offices in Denver, two hundred miles from the mines. Responsibility for the mining area fell to E. H. Weitzel, whose office was in Pueblo, fifty miles north of the area.

Colorado Fuel & Iron owned twenty-seven mining camps, including all of the land in these camps, the houses, the saloons, the schools, the churches and other buildings located within the camp environs, and the huts in which the miners lived and for which they paid exorbitant rents. A miner could be summarily evicted, since he had signed a lease agreeing that it could be terminated on three days' notice, and that he and his family could be immediately dispossessed. As a result, if a miner aroused the company's anger, this could bring about not only the loss of his job, but eviction from his home as well.

No words can adequately describe the contrast between the wild beauty of the Colorado countryside and the unspeakable squalor of these mining camps. The miners' huts, which were usually shared by several families, were made up of clapboard walls and thin-planked floors, with leaking roofs, sagging doors, broken windows, and old newspapers nailed to the walls to keep out the cold. Some families, particularly the Black families, were forced to live in tiny cubicles not much larger than chicken coops.[3]

Within sight of the huts were the coke ovens, the mine tipple, and the breaker house, with thick clouds of soot clogging the air and settling on the ground, effectively strangling any shoots of grass or flowers that tried to keep alive. Wriggling along the canyon walls, behind the huts, was a sluggish creek, dirty-yellow and laden with the slag of the mine and the refuse of the camps. Alongside the creek the children played, barefoot, ragged, and often hungry.

The miners received their wages, such as they were, in company scrip, which was discounted when coverted into cash; they traded in company stores, where they paid excessively high prices. They received treatment from a company doctor, whose fees were deducted from their wages whether they were sick or well. They worked in mines which were notorious for their lack of safety precautions and in a state which

had a grim record of fatal accidents. In 1912, the year preceding the strike, the rate of fatal accidents for the entire nation was 3.15 for each million tons of coal mined, while in Colorado, the rate was 11.86. The high accident rate in the Colorado mines was aggravated by the absence of any workman's compensation law in the state. The surviving widow and children of a mine accident victim were left to wage a relentless struggle against poverty.[4]

Each mining camp was a feudal domain, with the company acting as lord and master. It had a marshal, a law enforcement officer paid by the company. Teachers were chosen and paid by the company. Company officials were appointed as election judges. Company-dominated coroners and judges prevented injured employees from collecting damages. The "law" consisted of the company rules. Curfews were imposed. Company guards—brutal thugs armed with machine guns and rifles loaded with explosive bullets—would not admit any "suspicious" stranger into the camp and would not permit any miner to leave. It is not difficult to imagine the condition of the miners—the serfs—in such a community. Most of them were immigrants representing twenty-one nationality groups—Greeks, Italians, Croatians, Russians, Serbs, Montenegrins, Bulgarians, Poles, etc.—all equally held in contempt by the operators and their agents.[5]

On paper, Colorado had an excellent code of laws for the protection of workers. But in reality the will of the operator was the law. The operators prohibited the miners from appointing their own coal checkweighmen with the result that they were robbed of from 400 to 800 pounds in each ton; they paid their workers in company-printed scrip instead of legal currency, so that the average daily wage of $1.60 had a purchasing power of about one dollar; they worked the miners for more than eight hours a day; they prohibited them from patronizing stores of their own choice and compelled them to buy at company stores, where prices were often twice as high as elsewhere; and they forced the miners to vote as the foremen directed—all in open defiance of the law. The truth is that neither state, county, nor federal law counted for much in the feudal domain dominated by the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company. Reverend Atkinson of Colorado reported the following exchange in an interview with Colorado Governor Elias Ammons:

> Rev. Atkinson: Have you no constitutional law and government in Colorado?
>
> Gov. Ammons: Not a bit in those counties where the coal mines are located.

Rev. Atkinson: Do you mean to say that in large sections of your state there is no constitutional liberty?

Gov. Ammons: Absolutely none.[6]

In 1914, a report of the Commission on Industrial Relations stated: "Not only the government in these counties [Huerfano and Las Animas, coal counties], but of the state has been brought under their domination and forced to do the companies' bidding, and the same companies have even flaunted the will of the nation as expressed by the President of the United States." Little wonder, then, that one student of the 1913–1914 Colorado strike describes it "not so much as a struggle for higher wages or other tangible advantages as a revolt against a political, economic and social despotism."[7]

In 1901, Colorado was organized into a district of the United Mine Workers of America. During the next two years, the union grew, as thousands of miners, unable to endure the deplorable conditions in the coal camps, looked to unionism as a solution. In September, 1903, local delegates voted to strike unless their demands were granted. These included an eight-hour day, semi-monthly pay, the abolition of payment in company scrip, a 2,000-pound ton instead of one of 2,400; and better ventilation in the mines. Only the demand for an eight-hour day was not required by statutes; in fact, in the main, the miners were merely calling for the enforcement of the state laws.

When the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company and the Victor Fuel Company refused to negotiate, the miners struck on November 9. Immediately, strikers' families were evicted from the company houses; union organizers were arrested; and strikebreakers were rushed in, protected by company guards and state troops. After the company guards had killed and wounded several strikers, many of the strikers acquired weapons in order to defend themselves. Finally, military rule was established, financed by the coal companies, railroads, merchants, and property owners. Military arrests followed, and between four and five hundred striking miners were rounded up by the state soldiers and armed guards and loaded into two trains. One was dispatched to Kansas and the other to New Mexico. The men were unloaded in the prairies and warned to keep away from Colorado. This massive state intervention on the side of the coal companies broke the strike, and in October, 1904, it was called off.[8]

Nothing was gained by the strike, but it did serve to intensify the anger and resentment among the miners and set the stage for an even bitterer struggle between the union and the coal companies, for between

1904 and 1913, not a single change took place to improve the conditions of the miners. Indeed, many of the strikers of 1913 had been brought into the area as strikebreakers in 1903. Yet so grim were both their working and living conditions that they, in turn, became the strikers a decade later.

After secretly organizing a recruiting campaign for two years, the United Mine Workers sent Vice-President Frank J. Hayes, John McLennon, president of District No. 15 (which included Colorado), E. L. Doyle, secretary of District No. 15, and John Lawson, executive board member, to Colorado. A policy-making committee was established, and in an effort to stave off a strike, attempts were made to get Governor Ammons to arrange a conference with the mine operators. These failed, as did an attempt by the Department of Labor to mediate the dispute. Early in September, 1913, acting on a request from the UMW for assistance in mediating the dispute, Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson appointed Ethelbert Stewart as mediator. Before going to Colorado, Stewart first went to New York City to enlist the aid of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., but he could not even get in to see him. Instead, he was told by a member of Rockefeller's staff that any decision with regard to the policy of the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company would be made in Colorado and that the New York office would not interfere.[9]

On September 15, 1913, at Trinidad, Colorado, 250 delegates from the state's mining camps opened their convention, singing:

> We will win the fight today, boys,
> We'll win the fight today,
> Shouting the battle cry of union;
> We will rally from the coal mines,
> Shouting the battle cry of union.
>
> *Chorus:*
>
> The union forever, hurrah boys, hurrah!
> Down with the Baldwins,* up with the law;
> For we're coming, Colorado, we're coming all the way,
> Shouting the battle cry of union.

Fed up with Colorado Fuel & Iron's refusal even to meet with union representatives, the miners demanded action. They were supported by the veteran labor organizer, 83-year-old Mother Jones, just released from jail for having helped the West Virginia coal miners in their fight against company feudalism. In an hour-long speech, she stirred the miners' spirit of revolt:

*The reference is to the strikebreaking Baldwin-Felts guards.

> Rise up and strike. If you are too cowardly to fight, there are enough women in this country to come in and beat it out of you. If it is slavery or strike, why I say strike, until the last one of you drop into your graves. Strike and stay with it as we did in West Virginia. We are going to stay here in southern Colorado until the banner of industrial freedom floats over every coal mine. We are going to stand together and never surrender. When I get Colorado and Alabama organized, I will ask God to take me to my rest. I am going to force the operators to concede that human life is to be regarded above property life.

The convention voted unanimously to strike on September 23 for union recognition; a ten percent increase in wage scales; the eight-hour day; pay for "dead work" (timbering, removing fall, handling impurities, etc.); checkweighmen in all mines to be elected by the miners; free choice of stores, boarding houses, and doctors; enforcement of the Colorado mining laws; and "abolition of the notorious guard system which has prevailed in the mining camps of Colorado for many years." As in the case of the 1903 strike, nearly all of the demands were already on the statute books of Colorado but had been ignored by the company.[10]

Having learned through an effective spy system that the union's financial position was precarious and the UMW leaders did not really intend to go through with the strike, the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company did not take the strike vote seriously. On September 19, Superintendent Bowers informed the New York office that all the union officials really wanted was to obtain an interview with the operators in order to be able to boast "before the public that they have secured the principal point: namely, recognition of the union." Confident that the union was in no position to conduct an effective strike, the operators refused all further offers of mediation by the Department of Labor. E. M. Bowers informed Ethelbert Stewart, who had gone to Colorado in an effort to stave off a strike, that the company would never recognize the union. In a letter to Rockefeller, Bowers assured the absentee owner that the officials of the company "would stand by this declaration until our bones were bleached white as chalk in these Rocky Mountains." Rockefeller expressed complete approval of this course.[11]

While scoffing at the strike vote, the operators still took no chances. Even before the miners walked out, they ordered them out of the company houses into a bitter mountain winter. The UMW leased land just outside the company property, brought in tents from West Virginia, and set up tent colonies in Ludlow, Suffield, Forbes, Berwind, Starkville, La Veta, and seven other sites. On September 23, a scene of epic

proportions was enacted in the coal mine district of southern Colorado. Between eleven and thirteen thousand miners—about 90 percent of the workers in the mines—gathered up their belongings and moved with their families to the hastily improvised tent colonies.[12]

The miners' wives and children tried to keep warm that winter, in temperatures as low as forty to fifty degrees below zero, by shoveling out from under four to six-foot snowfalls, while their men fought a bloody war against strikebreakers, company guards, and Baldwin-Felts detectives sworn in as deputy sheriffs. The Baldwin-Felts agency brought in a special automobile, with a Gatling gun mounted on top, which became known as the "Death Special." Its side armored, it roamed the countryside with several rifle-carrying detectives in the front seat, attacking the tent colonies indiscriminately. Day after day, mine guards, wearing deputy badges, fired at the strikers. On October 5, the operators shipped four machine guns into the strike zone. The miners threw up breastworks and dug pits under the tents to protect the women and children.

The machine guns were not just for show. A machine gun fired into women and children being evacuated from the Forbes tent camp. One miner was killed, a small boy was hit nine times but survived, and a young girl was shot in the face. On October 24, 1913, mine guards, wearing deputy sheriff badges as usual, fired into a group of strikers in Walsenberg and killed four of them.[13]

As the violence intensified, Governor Ammons ordered the National Guard into the strike zone. The militia arrived in Ludlow on October 31, 1913 and received a warm welcome from the miners. Even State Adjutant-General Chase, a long-time hater of trade unions, remarked on the friendliness of the strikers toward the militiamen. He wrote in his report:

> The parade of the troops of the Ludlow tent colony was memorable. The road for a half-mile or more between the point of detraining and the entrance to the colony was lined on either side by men, women, and children. Many of the men were in the strange costume of the Greek, Montenegran, Serbian, and Bulgarian armies; for the colony numbered among its inhabitants many returned veterans of the Balkan wars. The little children were dressed in white, as for a Sunday-school picnic. All carried small American flags and sang continually the Union songs. Through this line of men, women, and children the troops paraded infantry, cavalry, and field artillery. Flags were waved in welcome, and an improvised band of the strikers heralded our approach.[14]

Within a few weeks, however, the feeling toward the troops changed

from friendliness to deep hostility. The thousand or so soldiers under Chase's command were literally strikebreaking agents of the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company. The company paid their salaries and the soldiers were quartered in company buildings and furnished with supplies by the company. Soon, the militia began recruiting mine guards to replace men released on the basis of hardship and business needs. The mine guards were in the favored position of receiving three dollars a day from the operators in addition to their one dollar as militiamen, both salaries paid by Colorado Fuel & Iron.[15]

On November 28, Governor Ammons, yielding to pressure, lifted the ban on the importation of strikebreakers from outside the state and ordered the militia to become the protective agent for the escort of the scabs into the mines. The source of the pressure for this step was spelled out by Superintendent Bowers in a letter to Rockefeller:

> Besides the bankers, the Chamber of Commerce, the Real Estate Exchange, together with a great many of the best business men, have been urging the Governor to take steps to drive these vicious agitators out of the state.
>
> Another mighty power has been rounded up in behalf of the operators by the gathering together of fourteen of the editors of the most important newspapers in Denver, Pueblo, Trinidad, Walsenberg, Colorado Springs, and other of the larger places of the state.[16]

In searching the miners' tents for guns, the militiamen robbed them and even raped some of the women. Strikers were thrown into jail without the slightest provocation and were held without any opportunity to prove their innocence. Mother Jones was arrested and held incommunicado for twenty days, with two armed sentries posted outside her prison door.

On January 22, 1914, there was a parade of women in Trinidad to protest the imprisonment of Mother Jones. At its head, an Italian woman carried the American flag. A troop of cavalry, led personally by General Chase, the commanding general of the militia, intercepted the marchers. When the parade reformed and started back to its initial point, a troop of cavalry, supported by foot soldiers, broke into the ranks of the women. A number of them were injured and eighteen were jailed. Not too long thereafter, militia cavalrymen destroyed the tent colony near Forbes and drove the inhabitants, including women and children, into a mountain snowstorm.[17]

After a careful investigation, a committee of four union men and Professor James H. Brewster of the University of Colorado found that the militia had tried to persuade strikers to go back into the mines; had

escorted strikebreakers into the area; had frequently held strikers for long periods without filing any charges; had assaulted young girls; and had participated in robberies and holdups. After investigating the strike situation during February and March, 1914, the Congressional Subcommittee ones and Mining concluded that the National Guard had been guilty of many of the same offenses. Finally, George P. West, who investigated the strike for the U. S. Commission on Industrial Relations, noted that "the Colorado National Guard no longer offered even a pretense of fairness or partiality, and its units in the field had degenerated into a force of professional gunmen and adventurers who were economically dependent on and subservient to the will of the coal operators."[18]

Although criticism of the militamen's conduct did not seem to affect Governor Ammons, the state's precarious financial position resulting from the mounting costs in helping the operators break the strike did. Early in April, 1914, the governor withdrew the bulk of the National Guard from the strike zone. Only 35 men in Company B, formerly mine guards, were left. On April 18, a hundred deputies in the pay of Colorado Fuel & Iron were formed into Troop A of the National Guard and were sent to join Company B. The designated spot was a rocky ridge overlooking the thousand men, women, and children who lived in the tent colony at Ludlow, the largest colony of strikers.

The Ludlow colony was under the supervision of Louis Tikas, a Greek strike leader, who was loved and admired by men, women, and children alike at the colony because of his deep concern for their welfare and his keen understanding of the problems of the strike. A graduate of the University of Athens, Tikas wielded considerable influence over the immigrants in southern Colorado, and especially over the Greeks, the most militant element among the strikers in the Ludlow colony.

The two officers selected to take charge of the command at the Ludlow colony were well-fitted for the job assigned them by the company. One was Major Patrick Hamrock, a Denver saloonkeeper. But the dominant figure was Lieutenant Kenneth E. Linderfelt, a man especially hated by the strikers who was known to the colony's inhabitants as "Jesus Christ," since he had once told a striker's wife, "I am Jesus Christ and my men on horses are Jesus Christs—and we must be obeyed." On December 30, 1913, the powerfully-built officer came upon a teenage boy, the son of a striker, on a road near the colony. He promptly knocked the youth unconscious. Linderfelt had a special hatred for Louis Tikas, to whom he referred contemptuously as "Lou the Greek." One day, Linderfelt found Tikas alone, beat him brutally, and had him dragged to jail.[19]

April 19, 1914 was the Greek Orthodox Easter Sunday, and a group of Ludlow strikers were picnicking in a nearby meadow. It was one of the first sunny days of spring, and they were playing baseball. Over the hill from the north came five gunmen on horseback, rifles slung over their shoulders. They stopped near the players and one of them shouted, "Have your fun today! We'll have our roast tomorrow."

On the morning of April 20, Linderfelt approached the camp at Ludlow and demanded that Louis Tikas release an "unidentified person." After a search, Tikas met Linderfelt at the Ludlow depot and assured him that no such person could be found. Although Linderfelt later conceded that he "could not remember" the anonymous person's name, he and his armed guard companions bitterly denounced the Greek strike leader. Finally, Tikas retreated toward the camp.

Shortly thereafter, the quiet of the morning was shaken by an explosion. Rushing from their tents, the strikers could see columns of black smoke rising slowly from Water Tank Hill, where the militia was stationed. Major Hamrock, after talking with General Chase, had ordered the explosion of two dynamite bombs as a signal to the troops, who were armed with Springfield rifles and at least two machine guns.

For a little while, the countryside was unbearably still and tense. Then, exactly at 9 a.m., the dull clatter of a machine gun began and the first bullets ripped through the canvas of the tents. The clatter became a deafening roar as more machine guns went into action. Then the high-powered rifles of the militiamen joined in and poured a hail of explosive bullets into the tents. Five strikers and a 10-year-old boy were killed by gunfire early in the battle as militia bullets ripped through the tents.[21]

The men dashed from tent to tent to draw the fire and flung themselves into deep arroyos—ugly gashes in the Ludlow hills. Many of the women had been undressed when the firing began, but they ran crazily from tent to tent, hugging children to their breasts, seeking shelter. Fifty of the women were pregnant, and one of the mothers gave birth to a baby as she fled from the colony. Some of the women managed to run off into the hills and hide in nearby ranch houses. Others crawled with their children into the dark pits and caves which had been dug under a few of the tents. It was these dugouts which saved the strikers' families from total annihilation, for the colony was mercilessly raked by rifle and machine gun fire during the day. "The soldiers and mine guards," an eyewitness reported, "tried to kill everybody; anything they saw move, even a dog, they shot at."[22]

Had it not been for Tikas' rescue efforts, the Ludlow horror might

have been even worse. Throughout the day, he and Pearl Jolly, the wife of a striker, moved from tent to tent, pulling the women and children out of their cellars and ordering them to move among the arroyos to the Black Hills, some two miles east of the colony. As Tikas was attempting to help a woman and two children escape from one of the cellars, he was captured by the troops. Linderfelt, who had threatened to "get" the union leader, now had his opportunity. Surrounded by his men, the burly lieutenant greeted his captive with, "Oh, it's you, you goddamn lousy red neck." Then, as Tikas replied, the lieutenant seized his army rifle by the barrel and brought the stock crashing down on the head of the defenseless prisoner with such force that the stock of the heavy gun was broken. Muttering that he had ruined a good rifle, Linderfelt turned and walked away. Three rifle bullets tore into Tikas' back, killing him. The terse report of the incident by the military board simply stated: "Lt. K. E. Linderfelt swung his Springfield rifle, breaking the head of the prisoner, Tikas."[23]

Two other union prisoners, among them James Fyler, the local union secretary, met their deaths in a similar manner. Both were shot deliberately by their captors.[24]

As the sun lowered behind the Black Hills on April 20, the firing of the guns decreased. The soldiers now moved slowly alongside the tents. They drenched the canvas with coal oil. At approximately 5:30 p.m., the southwest corner of the tent colony caught fire. At the same time, reinforcements for the militia in the form of deputy sheriffs arrived from Trinidad. Thus reinforced, Lieutenant Linderfelt led a raid on the stricken camp with the soldiers yelling battle cries as they ran. The screams of terrified women and children drowned out the war cries of the troops. When they reached the colony, the militiamen became a murderous, pillaging mob. The soldiers deliberately applied torches to the tents which had not yet caught fire. They looted and smashed their way through the miners' homes, systematically destroying what they were unable to steal.

On Tuesday morning, April 21, the sun shone down on a pitiful scene. The Ludlow tent colony, which had for seven months been the homes of the striking miners and their families, was now a miserable shambles. Here and there, an iron bedstead, a stove, a child's toy, and bits of broken pottery and glass marked the former site of a tent. It was then that a telephone lineman, going through the ruins, lifted a twisted iron cot that covered one of the larger pits and discovered the bodies of two young mothers and eleven children, ranging in age from three months to

nine years. The coroner's jury which investigated the cause of the burning of the tent colony concluded that the cause of the deaths was "fire started by militiamen under Major Hamrock and Lt. Linderfelt, or mine guards, or both. . . ."[25]

"The number of fatalities at Ludlow may never be known for certain," concludes George P. McGovern in his study of the strike. But it is likely that thirty-two persons were either shot or burned to death. After a farcical trial, Linderfelt and others connected with the outrages were found guilty and "punished" by trifling changes in their eligibility for promotion.[26]

The story of the "Ludlow Massacre" was headlined in the press all over the country, although it sometimes received second place to headlines about the developing crisis with Mexico. Some papers tried to shift the blame from the company and its hired gunmen to the miners. Thus, the conservative *New York Times,* while referring to "crazily officered troops" and while describing the events at Ludlow as "worse than the order that sent the Light Brigade into the jaws of death, worse in its effects than the Black Hole of Calcutta," nevertheless reported: "Women and Children Roasted in Pits of Tent Colony as Flames Destroy It. Miners Store of Ammunition and Dynamite Exploded Scattering Death and Ruin." But the Denver *Express* put the blame where it belonged when it wrote: "Mothers and daughters were crucified at Ludlow on the cross of human liberty. Their crucifixion was effected by the operators' paid gunmen. . . . These dead will go down in history as the hero victims of the burnt offering laid on the altar of [the] Great God Greed."[27]

At the conclusion of a Ludlow protest meeting in Carnegie Hall in New York City, Upton Sinclair organized a demonstration in front of the Rockefeller office at 26 Broadway. Wearing bands of black crepe to symbolize the death of the Ludlow victims, he and four women began to walk silently back and forth in front of the Rockefeller headquarters. When the group was arrested and jailed for this "disturbance," Mrs. Sinclair and others continued the "mourning picket line."

At the head of New York's May Day parade that year was a delegation of "mourners" protesting the murder of the Colorado miners. Among the banners they carried were many with slogans denouncing Rockefeller, the most striking of which read "He uses Bibles in New York and Bullets in Colorado"—a bitter reference to Rockefeller's famous Sunday School sermons.[29]

From the United Mine Workers an appeal went out to all national and international labor unions in the country: "Will you, for God's sake and

in the name of humanity, call upon your citizenship to demand of the President of the U. S. and both Houses of Congress to leave Mexico alone and come into Colorado and relieve those miners, their wives and children, who are being slaughtered by murderous mine guards."[30] And from Denver came a "Call to Arms," addressed to the unionists of Colorado and signed by the UMW officials and the secretary-treasurer of the Western Federation of Miners. It read:

> Organize the men in your community in companies of volunteers to protect the workers of Colorado against the murder and cremation of men, women, and children by armed assassins in the employ of coal corporations, serving under the guise of state militiamen.
>
> The state is furnishing no protection to us and we must protect ourselves, our wives and children, from these murderous assassins. We intend to exercise our lawful right as citizens to defend our homes and our constitutional rights.[31]

From coast to coast, there was a response to the appeal of the Colorado miners. Hundreds of mass meetings were held. Thousands of dollars were sent for arms and ammunition, and armed trade unionists were arriving in Colorado, when Federal troops, sent by President Wilson, came in.

The Ludlow tragedy had turned Colorado into a battlefield. As news of it spread, strikers in all parts of southern Colorado, joined by outraged laboring men and sympathizers, poured into the strike zone and struck back furiously against the wanton killings. The enraged strikers attacked company camps and mines throughout southern Colorado and even in the vicinity of Denver. Governor Ammons tried to stem the violence by ordering an additional six hundred militiamen to report to duty, but only about twenty-five percent of the men responded. At last, in desperation, the governor admitted that the situation was beyond his control and asked President Wilson for Federal troops. On April 28, Wilson declared a state of national emergency in Colorado and directed that Federal troops proceed immediately to the strike area.[32]

The Federal troops arrived in Colorado on May 2.* Soon, the mine

*United States regular army troops were also sent later that same year to Arkansas during the strike led by District 21 of the United Mine Workers against the Mammoth Vein Coal Mining Company in Sebastian County. The strike began early in 1914 when the company refused to renew its contract with the UMW and attempted to operate with non-union labor. The troops were sent in by the Secretary of War after pitched battles between armed union miners and company guards resulted in several workers being killed and the main mine almost totally destroyed. The federal troops were commanded by Major Nathaniel McClure, a veteran of the Colorado coal field wars. The strike ended in defeat. (Samuel A. Sizer, "'This is Union Man's Country,' Sebastian County 1914," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly,* vol. XXVII, Winter, 1968, pp. 306–29.)

guards and militia were withdrawn, strikers and deputy sheriffs alike were required to surrender their arms, and strikebreakers imported in violation of state law were compelled to leave. Thus the fighting ended.[33] But the strike dragged on while the operators showed not the slightest willingness to yield. In testimony before the House Committee on Mines and Mining and before the U. S. Commission on Industrial Relations, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. made this position crystal clear. After explaining that he had not visited Colorado for ten years and had relied completely for information about the labor situation on the word of the officials of the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company (a statement which the Commission on Industrial Relations later characterized as bearing no semblance to the truth),* Rockefeller gave his complete support to the company officials in Denver. He insisted, first, that the strike was simply the work of outside agitators and that the miners themselves had no legitimate grievance; and secondly, that the "open shop" represented a great American principle in defense of which no sacrifice was too great. When Congressman Martin Foster suggested that perhaps "the killing of people and shooting of children" might impel Rockefeller to inquire more carefully into the situation, the witness outlined his view of what was at stake in the Colorado struggle:

> We believe that the issue is not a local one in Colorado. It is a national issue whether workers shall be allowed to work under such conditions as they may choose. As part owners of the property, our interest in the laboring men in this country is so immense, so deep, so profound that we stand ready to lose every cent we have put in that company rather than see the men we have employed thrown out of work and have imposed upon them conditions which are not of their seeking and which neither they nor we can see are in our interest.

Congressman Foster asked if Rockefeller preferred that the violence continue rather than make an attempt to settle the strike, to which the witness replied, in effect, that only one thing could be done to settle the strike, and that was to unionize the camps, "and our interest in labor is so profound, and we believe so sincerely that interest demands that the camps shall be open camps, that we expect to stand by the officers at all costs." When asked by Congressman Foster if he would hold to that

*In its report, the Commission noted that "he [Rockefeller] followed step by step the struggle of his executive officials to retain arbitrary power, and to prevent the installation of machinery for collective bargaining, by which abuses might automatically be corrected, and he supported and encouraged this struggle in every letter he wrote to his agents." (63rd Congress, 3rd Session, *House Document 136,* Washington, D. C., 1915, *Report on the Colorado Strike Investigation,* p. 34.)

position "if that costs all your property and kills all your employees," Rockefeller replied: "It is a great principle."[34]

It was when he was questioned at the hearings of the Commission on Industrial Relations by its chairman, Frank P. Walsh, that Rockefeller's facade of upholding democratic principles in opposing unionism and of being so far removed from the events in Colorado began to crumble. Having examined the correspondence between the coal company officials and the Rockefeller office in New York, Walsh introduced concrete evidence that Rockefeller had fully supported the refusal of the company to negotiate with the union. It was clear from the correspondence that both the company in Colorado and Rockefeller insisted upon the unconditional surrender of the United Mine Workers.[35]*

The two government agencies that heard Rockefeller's testimony concluded that the strike could have been settled, but that "Rockefeller would rather spend the money of the company for guns, pay of detectives and mine guards and starve the miners into submission."[36] And that is how the strike finally ended—with the miners starved into submission. Early in September, 1914, President Wilson submitted to both sides proposals to end the strike, based on the recommendations of two presidential appointees—Hywel Davies and W. R. Fairley. The settlement called for the operators and miners to pledge themselves to a three-year truce based on six conditions: (1) that the mine labor laws of the state be strictly enforced; (2) the restoration of work of all striking miners who had not been found guilty of violating the law; (3) the prohibition of intimidation of either union or non-union workers; (4) the abolition of the mine guards; (5) the prohibition of picketing and parading; and (6) no suspension of work pending the investigation of any matter in dispute. Responsibility for enforcing the conditions was to be placed in the hands of three commissioners to be appointed by the president, and a majority decision of the commission was to be final.[37]

The miners accepted the proposal on September 16 at a convention in Trinidad, the site of the strike vote a year earlier. But the operators only accepted three of the proposals, rejecting two out of hand (2 and 6), and accepting the remaining one only if modified. They insisted they could

*When asked by Walsh if he should not inquire as to the responsibility of company officials for the Ludlow tragedy, Rockefeller replied: "Well, I think so long as I am undertaking to do the things that I think should be done I shall have to reserve the right to do them in the ways that seem to me best." Asked by Walsh if he did not feel moral responsibility for the violence, in view of the fact that the militia in the Ludlow killings were paid from company funds, Rockefeller answered: "I should have felt greater responsibility for the officers of the company if they had not used all means in their power to protect life and property." (*New York Times,* May 21, 1915.)

not restore to work all who had not been found guilty, since there were still 332 miners under indictment for murder and another 137 for other so-called crimes.[38]

As its final effort to break the deadlock, union officials agreed to hold a convention of the striking miners on November 19 for the purpose of calling off the strike, on condition that President Wilson would appoint a commission to arbitrate the dispute. The president quickly accepted the UMW proposal and appointed a special three-man commission of arbitration. Meanwhile, Federal troops patrolled the strike area, limiting the strikers' ability to picket or otherwise carry out strike duties. On December 10, 1914, a special UMW convention in Denver called off the strike. Federal troops began to leave Colorado on January 1, 1915, and by the tenth of the month, the state was again in complete control.

So, too, were the coal operators. After fifteen months, the strike had been crushed by a combination of guns, bayonets, and hunger. At least sixty-six men, women, and children had been killed. Not one militiaman or mine guard had been indicted for murder, but John R. Lawson, the leader of the strike against Colorado Fuel & Iron, was tried and convicted of murder.* The union had not won recognition.** Instead, a company union—the Industrial Representation Plan—was installed in the mining camps.[39]

The Industrial Representation Plan, worked out by McKenzie King of Canada in close cooperation with Rockefeller, went into effect at the Colorado Fuel & Iron coal mines in October, 1915 and in the company's Pueblo steel mills during the following year. Soon known as the "Rockefeller Plan," it represented the birth of company unions. It provided that the men at each mine should elect at least two representatives to serve for a period of one year. These men were to meet annually with an equal number of company officials, and at these sessions, they were given the right to discuss grievances or other matters of interest.[40]

As might be expected, the United Mine Workers denounced the plan. Nor was it alone. After a careful study, U. S. Commission on Industrial

*Lawson was accused of murdering John Nimmo, one of the deputies paid by the companies and appointed by the sheriff. No effort was made to prove that Lawson had fired the fatal shot. Commenting on his conviction, the Commission on Industrial Relations declared: "It is anarchism for profits and revenge, and it menaces the security and integrity of American institutions as they seldom have been menaced before." (*Report on the Colorado Strike Investigation,* p. 22.) Lawson's conviction was overturned on appeal.

**Although technically the Colorado strike was lost by the United Mine the mining camps, Joseph G. Rayback points out that the union itself showed a new spurt of life during the same period, as 150,000 miners joined its ranks. (*A History of American Labor,* New York, 1963, p. 258.)

Relations investigator George P. West agreed with the union that it was a company tool which offered the workers only the illusion of collective bargaining. The plan, he pointed out, embodied "none of the principles of effectual collective bargaining and instead is a hypocritical pretense of granting what is in reality withheld." It was a plan devised, not for the benefit of the employees, he declared, "but for the purpose of ameliorating or removing the unfavorable criticism of Mr. Rockefeller which had arisen throughout the country following his rejection of President Wilson's plan of settlement. . . ."[41]

It soon became clear that the plan provided no relief from many of the miners' most common grievances. The battle of the miners against the Rockefeller-dominated Colorado Fuel & Iron Company continued. In 1928, another strike broke out. The United Mine Workers was back again, this time for good. Later, the United Steel Workers of America organized the steel mills of Colorado Fuel & Iron.

Today, on the site of the "Ludlow Massacre," there stands a monument erected by the United Mine Workers. Annually, thousands of union-conscious motorists turn off the main highway between Trinidad and Pueblo to look at this shrine. On the monument is the inscription: "In memory of the men, women, and children who lost their lives in freedom's cause at Ludlow, Colorado, April 20, 1914." Some sing one of the songs written by the striking miners shortly after the outrage, called "The Ludlow Massacre," which went:

> Now folks, let me tell you a story
> About a terrible crime
> That was done in Ludlow, Colorado
> To men that work in the mine.
>
> Our children they were so hungry,
> Our wives were thin and worn;
> We were striking against a rich man,
> Meanest ever was born.
>
> John D., he'd stacks of money,
> John D., he'd stacks of gold;
> John D., he was warm in winter
> While mining folks went cold.
>
> He sent down his hired gunmen,
> They'd orders to shoot on sight,
> He sent down troops with helmets
> To break the miners' fight.

John D., he was a Christian,
John D., the psalms he sung;
But he'd no mercy in his heart,
He shot down young and old.

One night when all were sleeping,
All wrapped up in their dreams,
We heard a loud explosion,
We heard most terrible screams.

"Oh, save us from the burning flames,"
We heard our children cry;
But John D. laughed and shot them down
Right there before our eyes.

Folks the country over
And mining camps around,
Their hearts got sick with pity,
At what happened in our town.

It was a terrible thing to do,
It was an awful thing;
And mining men like me made up
This little song to sing.

To sing it to the people,
Poor folks that work and sweat,
What John D. did in Ludlow
They never should forget.[42]